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LIFELONG EROTIC SEX IN MARRIAGE: Replacing Infatuation with Intimacy

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Regardless of the current fashion, whether it's de rigueur to belittle or to champion marriage and family, sociologically they are extraordinarily important institutions. The explanation is uncomplicated: marriage and family have formed the foundation of historically productive social life. We see this in the linkage of the micro family to the macro society. Healthy marriages disproportionately produce healthy families, which in turn produce healthy communities, and healthy communities produce healthy institutions, which ultimately are the bulwarks of a healthy society. Certainly, there are many forces other than marriage and family that affect the health of a society. But when large numbers of marriages and families break up, whatever the reasons, then the education and upbringing of children—the coming generation of citizens—suffer dramatically, typically deprived of moral and civic values and education. The upshot is that we begin to see the decay of ever-larger communities, and eventually the failure of the institutional underpinnings of society when it all becomes epidemic.¹

As the Talmud (Shabbat 10b) teaches, when situations go wrong in family life, “the matter evolves” (הַמַּחֲלָה הַזֶּה) far beyond the innocuous beginnings.²

Deuteronomy 24:5 provides a clear statement³ of Torah perspective on the national importance of marriage and family. So even when the nation is engaged in war, its national interest in establishing a solid foundation of marriage and family may be prioritized over drafting a newlywed to serve in the Army or continue in business.⁴ It's an explicit policy confirmation of the critical connection between marriage, family, community, and nation—that marriage and family are of pivotal importance to the survival and success of the nation. As Rabbi Reuven Bulka (b. 1944) teaches, “The bride and the groom, then, are also on the front lines, not fighting external threat, but rather preventing internal erosion.”⁵

From the perspective of rabbinic pastoral counseling, marriage and family are extraordinarily important because many people we see professionally come to us with problems related to marriage and family breakdown, which in turn have destructive secondary conse-

quences, especially for their children. Often, we're positioned to help people avoid situations of marriage and family life that have a high probability of failure, because we know the essentials of achieving “Better love relationships [which] mean better families.”⁶

Destructive Cultural Ideas

Part of the explanation for the large number of marriage and family breakdowns—certainly why more couples fail to successfully renew them—we ascribe to popular cultural ideas about love and sex, and the promotion of those ideas in the mass media.

One of the widely circulated misunderstandings about sex and marriage is that lust, the intense sexual desire experienced before sex, is an essential quality to maintain in a marriage; that when it dissipates, one or both partners are susceptible to someone outside of the marriage who reignites those feelings of intense desire.⁷ The implication is that lust is essential for continuously satisfying erotic sex, but nothing could be further from the truth. Lust per se is neither a predictor nor a measure of consistently fulfilling erotic sex for one or both members of the couple.

The assertion that a primary goal in relationships is to satisfy our lust is misleading at best. First, “satisfying lust” is an oxymoron. The nature of such intense desire is that we remain perpetually unsatisfied because it is a self-serving search for perfect sensual gratification, which is unobtainable. As Rabbi Chaim Navon (DOB unk.) teaches, it also requires objectifying one's sexual partner to satisfy one's own needs,⁸ which is why engaging in an endless series of unsatisfying short-lived sexual relationships is so common and popular. Second, it's important to distinguish between lust based on infatuation and passion based on intimacy, a distinction we consider in greater detail below. Withal, seeking to satisfy lust for its own sake is problematic, even for someone single, but certainly in marriage and family life, the hallmarks of which are reciprocity.

Another popular idea is that it's difficult if not impossible to sustain sexual desire with one spouse over decades. However, large-scale, peer-reviewed research

strongly suggests that the happiness-maximizing number of sexual partners for any previous year is *one*.⁹

The common belief, nonetheless, is that monogamy is no more natural to humankind than it is to our closest primate relatives. The mistaken conclusion is that the challenge to contemporary marriages is not infidelity but our lack of honesty about extra-marital relationships. This belief has two fundamental flaws, apart from the obvious distinction that human beings are unlike all other primates in that we have the capacity to make future-contemplated, free-willed moral choices.

First, it implicitly treats sexual desire apart from sexual experience (which is a hallmark of infatuation), but sexual desire continues unabated if one's sexual experience remains erotically fulfilling. The existential threat to most marriages is not the loss of desire (or lust), which is only a symptom, but the lack of a broad spectrum of intimacy to enable erotic experience when making love (about which, more below).

Second, monogamy is not an antiquated practice, but long-lived cultural wisdom regarding the essential conditions of Jewish family life. Multiple sexual partners in our marriages have several insidious effects:

They sabotage the primary responsibility of parents vis-à-vis their children. The essence of the traditional role of Jewish parents' is not to ensure their children's material success but to pass on to them moral-spiritual knowledge and observance, which equips them to achieve lifelong meaning and fulfillment in both their private and public lives. Multiple sexual partners confuse and divide children's loyalties, leaving them unsure of who they should look to for moral teaching and day-to-day standards of behavior; and, not incidentally, priming them for a lifetime of secular, self-indulgent, amoral autonomy.

The presence of multiple sexual partners is unquestionably contrary to Torah-based married life, even in the liberal streams of Judaism. So it poisons extended-family relations, which are of immeasurable value both to parents and children, particularly in otherwise isolated nuclear families. The withdrawal of extended-family support when multiple sexual partners are present in the nuclear family should not be surprising. Their withdrawal is understandable when the alternative appears likely to be futile confrontation and conflict with the couple participating in what at best is regarded as a morally questionable practice and at worst as clearly damaging for the children involved.

And, typically, when spouses seek multiple sexual partners, it's a telltale sign of a marriage begun mostly on the basis of infatuation, which in turn not surprisingly led to failed sexual relations devoid of the previously mentioned spectrum of intimacy. The effect of choosing the multiple-partners option to remedy marital dissatisfaction is that commitment to repair the marriage ceases, probably because the couple lacks the knowledge or the will to build the essential intimacy, which may be the best explanation of why many "open marriages" lead quickly to divorce.¹⁰

The epitome of misguided ideas circulating about long-lived sexual pleasure may be the so-called "gag"

book, *Sex After 50*, which contains only blank pages. However, substantial research confirms that a significant proportion of elderly couples enjoy a rewarding sex life.¹¹

Marriage and family troubles follow from external social forces that create pressures on them, and from internal dynamics that can pull them apart. We understand and respond to the problems by organizing coalitions and lobbying for legislation and evidence-based policies in public and private agencies; and by individual, couple, and family counseling and therapy. This paper focuses on some of the internal forces that pull apart marriages and long-term relationships, particularly those related to sexual activity.

When considering marriages and families, there is an aphorism to keep in mind as a pastoral counselor. Our goal is to help clients have happy, productive and fulfilled lives of moral-spirituality.¹² But as Rabbi Avi Shafran (DOB unk.) teaches, we need to understand—helping those we serve also to understand—that true happiness begins with the realization of what does *not* make us happy.¹³ So it's often necessary to help people let go of attitudes and actions that monopolize their time, effort, resources, and spirit, but fail to make them happy—more of which we're about to consider.

Sex-Based Roles & Activity

Successful family life begins to a significant extent with sex-based roles and the sexual activity related to them. And a great deal of that has changed in the last 50 to 100 years in the United States. For example, half a century ago, in the mid-1960s, typically there were two or three women in first-year law school classes. Currently, women make up half of those first-year classes. But even with dramatic changes in women's access to rights, roles, and resources traditionally monopolized by men, some very important aspects of social life have remained largely unchanged: American culture still powerfully conditions females to excel at emotional intimacy rather than exercising power. In contemporary American society, although exceptions are common, we condition females from their early years to be capable and comfortable with expression and acceptance of emotion. Males from their early years are still powerfully conditioned to excel at exercise and acceptance of power rather than emotional intimacy.

Given these sex-based differences, there are common self-destructive and dysfunctional behavioral patterns of young men and women that may persist into adulthood. Young men commonly focus on sexual conquests of young women. Their use of sex to experience emotional intimacy with young women may lead to destructive porn addiction and a diagnosis of "intimacy disorder" in later adulthood. Young women commonly grant or withhold sexual favors to control young men. Their use of sex to exert power over young men may lead in later adulthood to vulnerability and dependency when their male partners react with counter-controlling behavior, which hardly gives these women an experience of wielding power.

What about the sex itself? We might think that for most young people, the immediate experience of sexual activity is physical pleasure.¹⁴ But that's far from universally true, which may partially explain the long-term trend of fewer young people engaging in sex.¹⁵ The immediate psychological and emotional outcomes of sex for young people are often problematic. Not uncommonly, young women feel cheapened, even degraded or exploited by the experience.¹⁶ Ironically, what they may have embarked upon to exercise power and control over their male partners leaves them feeling powerless.¹⁷ They then experience a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, sometimes trauma, possibly intensified by early-life insecure attachment.¹⁸ Not uncommonly, young men feel alienated by their sexual experience. Ironically, what they may have launched unwittingly to remedy their emotional intimacy deficit leaves them emotionally alienated from their partners and themselves, also possibly magnified by early-life insecure attachment.¹⁹ They then experience greater relationship-isolation, and a need to compensate by promoting intimacy with male friends, often through physical contact in sports or by the false intimacy of proclaiming their sexual prowess.²⁰

Despite these problematic aspects, such sexual relations often serve as the misguided drivers of long-term relationships, marriages, and families, in chronological as well as psychological and emotional respects. So, to a significant extent, socially defined sex-based roles and much of the sexual activity that follows from them do not provide a healthy foundation for family life and, instead, are often precursors of marital infidelity.

Costs of Sexual Infidelity

The essential commitment that accompanies marriage for most married couples is "sexual fidelity," which they don't necessarily expect when simply living together "without benefit of clergy," as we once described cohabiting. Nowadays, although young people rarely use the term "adultery," their marital expectations still include sexual fidelity.²¹ Yet even so, our estimate is that approximately 50 percent of married men and 25 percent of married women are unfaithful.

Since unrestrained sexual license is commonplace in modern society, it's useful to consider some of the typical consequences of infidelity, which include:

- Lying
- Deceitful behavior
- Violations of vows and shattering of trust
- Emotional trauma to spouses and children
- Disease
- Family breakup and divorce
- Compromised long-term support for children
- Violence and, occasionally, murder

Despite these destructive consequences, adultery is not a crime²² in more than half the states and rarely prosecuted where it is still against the law; and most Americans concluded long ago that we should not criminalize adultery. That criminal laws can't fix many serious social problems tells us that morality, potentially, plays a critical role in social stability. And most Ameri-

cans regard "cheating" on one's spouse, having extra-marital affairs, as immoral, although normative and often not illegal. They view adultery as something one chooses to do although, as noted above, it causes great harm and far-reaching, damaging consequences. Why label unfaithfulness in marriage as immoral—why should we bother? By doing so, we acknowledge the potentially devastating outcomes of infidelity, in contrast to treating it simply as a matter of "personal preference" or "lifestyle choice."

Are extra-marital affairs a societal problem? The question draws us back to why society labels them as immoral. Consider that extra-marital affairs are significantly correlated with the breakdown of marriages; the breakdown of marriages is significantly correlated with high divorce rates; high divorce rates are significantly correlated with children's various psychological, mental, and emotional problems and, in turn, with juvenile delinquency and adult crime; family disintegration and the dysfunctions that accompany it are significantly correlated with community breakdown, particularly in inner-city areas; and the breakdown of communities in the inner cities is significantly correlated with a general weakening of the nation's institutions.

Infatuation Foundation of Marriage & Family

To understand what can and cannot provide a healthy foundation for marriage and family, it's useful to begin by considering what constitutes a "family." What are the benchmarks of what we call family?

Ordinarily, we consider members of a nuclear (in contrast to an extended) family as related by blood, marriage, or a legal process, and we tend to expect that they're living together in the same household. Nowadays, however, we count as nuclear families, unmarried couples that live together for many years and possibly have children. The "politically correct" definition of family is that a family is whatever any group of people say is a family, which obviously is not an adequate definition to qualify for public benefits—say, for example, as a surviving "spouse" of a deceased soldier. Legislating and administering public benefits would be politically impossible and a bureaucratic nightmare if one's qualifications to receive them were a matter of self-definition. And it's not an adequate definition of family to qualify for private benefits—say, for example, membership in a synagogue; religions would not be able to maintain their unique systems of belief, teaching, and practice in the face of myriad self-selected, unbelieving, even hostile members. So, as a society, we recognize that marriage offers advantages over more informal and casual arrangements.

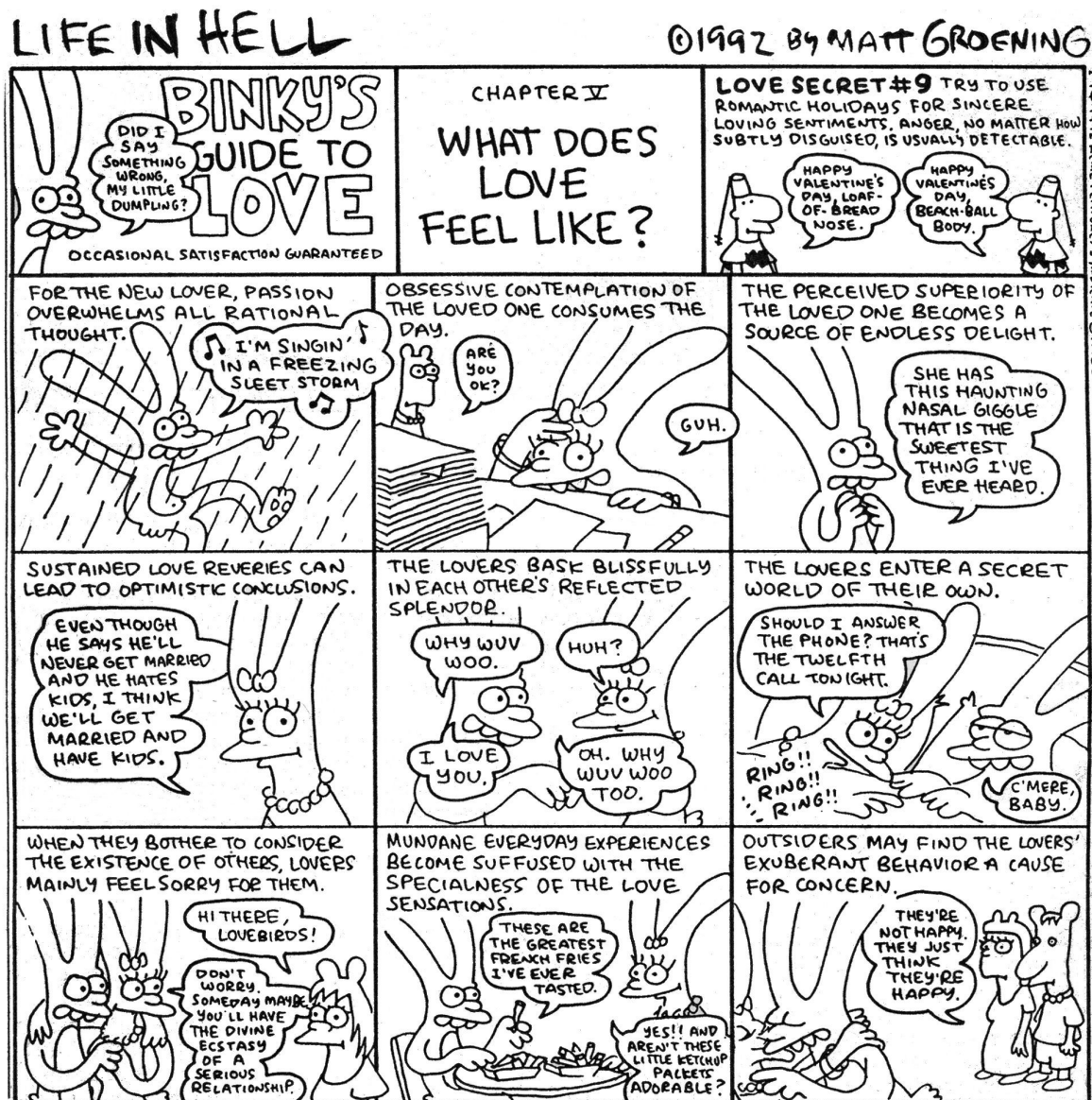
Governmental license and religious ritual positively sanction marriage and the family arrangements to which it commonly leads. Those two formal sanctions, the license that legally certifies marriage and the ritual that religiously sanctifies marriage, have very different functions: The legal document reinforces legal rights, roles, and responsibilities, such as the equal division of community property in the event of divorce, which we acknowledge as beneficial or at least marginally useful.

The religious ritual presumably denotes a shared commitment to specific moral and ethical values, principles, and practices, such as telling the truth to one another, for the couple's life together.

Yet what are some of the most popular reasons that couples choose to marry?²³ Certainly, they look for shared interests, common desire for children, and economic, educational, and social compatibility. But in contemporary marriages, "falling in love" is the sine qua non.²⁴ As the keystone of marriage and family, what does it mean to say that people have fallen in love? How do we define falling in love? Is it that feeling you get when you bump into "the right one"? Consciously or unconsciously, most people seem to believe that falling in love is a sensation, based on physical and emotional attraction, one that magically and spontaneously generates when Mr. or Ms. "Right" appears.

Another way to approach the question of falling in love is to ask: What happened to the people who fell in love when they fell out of love and divorced? Is it that, speaking more precisely, initially they became infatuated with one another without knowing one another's personality and character? When we drill down into these commonplace circumstances, we find that most women and many men expect that their marriages will provide a spectrum of special and exclusive intimacy—emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, which not surprisingly is disappointed when their spouse reveals an inability or unwillingness to engage in such intimacy—which was not known beforehand because the basis of the marriage was infatuation.

What is "infatuation"? The word infatuation comes from the Latin, meaning: "made to be foolish" or, in effect, easily fooled. Binky's "Guide to Love" humorously portrays the better-known features of infatuation:



When partners who began their relationship with infatuation begin to know one another's personality and character, they often find that they easily fooled themselves, because they don't particularly like what they discover. There is an additional, ironic complication to youthful infatuation. When we are young and infatuated, we not only leap-frog knowing the character and personality of the person with whom we fall in love, we may not have sufficiently matured to truly know ourselves, our own character and personality, which ultimately has the same effect as superficially knowing the object of our infatuation.

But one may ask, why in this specific aspect of life do humans universally become easily fooled? The pattern is repeated in virtually all cultures. We like to believe that when we fall in love, it's a choice we're making about another individual, although an emotionally charged choice. It seems, however, that the answer to our question is not in the vein of romance or emotion. The over-the-top response to the "special other" is not based on emotion or sex drive, notwithstanding our powerful emotional and sexual responses.

The experience of infatuation reflects our inheritance of the mammalian brain system for choosing mates.²⁵ There is a specific neural brain mechanism that "... motivates the... chooser to *pursue a preferred* mating partner, the courtship attraction system." Brain imaging pinpoints in this regard the release of dopamine in the brain reward centers. "It's actually been shown that being in-love, infatuation, is basically acquired OCD."²⁶ So it makes perfect sense when we hear the love-struck declare, "it washed over me like a tidal wave." And it's no surprise that what we might call the "electrifying" dimension of falling in love, now identified as mostly the effect of a chemical process in the brain, is not a good predictor of a successful marriage, although it certainly feels like "divine ecstasy" for the typically brief time it lasts.

Moreover, what many people subsequently experience as a uniquely personal loss of romantic excitement in relationships, peculiar to themselves individually, is in fact a widespread phenomenon, one researched and reported in the social science literature as "hedonic adaptation." The most revealing aspect of this dynamic is that the "honeymoon" phase of a relationship—marked by preoccupation with one's partner, ecstasy, optimism, and eudaimonia—is not sustainable. Hedonic adaptation dictates that, as we increasingly achieve a desirable objective or object, such as a romantic partner, it becomes increasingly less attractive to us.²⁷

Lyubomirsky notes: "Sexual passion and arousal are particularly prone to hedonic adaptation."²⁸ Bao and Lyubomirsky have also noted that, "... when adaptation does begin, it may accelerate more rapidly than in less passionate relationships, such as when an individual suddenly gets a clear-eyed view of her partner's failings. . . . Of course, some will be tempted to reset the adaptation process altogether by swapping their relationship for a newer and more exciting one..."²⁹ However, although hedonic adaptation has been described as

a "treadmill," it does not necessarily develop in the same way for every individual.³⁰

Roman

Often when we say that people fell in love, we have an image of a romantic relationship. And for those who imagine they'll have such a romantic relationship, we might ask, what would be the benchmarks of the relationship—what would make it romantic? One of the benchmarks of successful marriage is the partners' long-lived fulfilling sexual relations. Imagine that as a pastoral counselor you have a congregant who looks forward to finding a romantic partner and having a romantic relationship. It's not likely that any of the following potentially long-lived conditions correspond to your congregant's ideas of romance:

- That the fulfilling quality of making love lasts not for a year or even a decade, but for a lifetime—literally, into one's old age;
- That when making love, one almost always feels safe, secure, and satisfied—before, during, and after—again, for a lifetime; and
- That making love is an indispensable part of continuous lifelong intimacy—emotional, intellectual, and spiritual—with one's partner.

This group of characteristics does *not* correspond to what we think of as romance. In a similar vein, we might ask a congregant we're counseling, which of the following two situations would be preferable?

- First, that you become sexually aroused by the thought of your partner's physical attributes or by the thought of physical contact between you and your partner.
- Or second, that you become sexually aroused when you are physically close and not thinking about anything physical, but instead thinking and possibly talking about why and how you love your partner.

What's the difference between the two situations, and why might we prefer one more than the other? Obviously, the first situation reflects not having fallen in love but having "fallen in lust" or sexual desire. It's a virtual certainty that infatuation with the physical aspects of one's partner will diminish notably in a relatively short period of time. In this respect, romance has no staying power. The second situation reflects loving another person based on a spectrum of intimacy in the relationship, and on the character of the partners that's revealed in their day-to-day life together, which in turn makes possible their deepening attachment to one another.³¹ It's likely that, based on authentic intimacy and admirable character, the erotic aspects of the relationship will be durable and deepen over time.

The commonplace experience of young people is that infatuation-driven sex begins with sexual excitement but becomes boring over a relatively short period of time; while sex based on a growing spectrum of intimacy often begins unremarkably but becomes erotically satisfying over time.

One of the most common complaints in relationship breakups is "sexual incompatibility." The partners

voice their dissatisfaction with their sexual life, which they see as a deal-breaker. Obviously, there are many possible reasons why two people may find it difficult or impossible to achieve sexual pleasure and fulfillment together, including:

- If one or both partners *individually* have psychological or emotional baggage, such as insecure attachment in infancy (which is indirectly recognized by traditional Judaism³²) and developmental trauma in childhood, mutually fulfilling sex is far less likely;³³
- If the *couple* has serious unresolved psychological or emotional baggage, such as unresolved betrayal trauma,³⁴ sexual frustration is inevitable;
- If one or both partners *individually* have serious physical health problems or limitations, such as age-related diminished libido or atrophic vaginitis, diminution of sexual activity is possible;
- If the *couple* or family system is under severe financial or other pressure, the potential for satisfying sex is significantly limited; and
- If the *couple* is living in a place and time of natural catastrophe, war, or other cataclysmic events, sex drive may be dramatically reduced.

But even if none of the foregoing reasons apply, successfully making love may be largely impossible because of what we might superficially call “communication failures.” For example, many people find it difficult to tell their sex-partner, “I want to love you when and in ways that are pleasurable for you. Please tell me what you would like me to do and not do.” And many people find it difficult to be open and frank about what pleases them and does not please them sexually. We may feel awkward and self-conscious, somewhat embarrassed, proposing that we’re entirely committed to someone else’s sexual pleasure, or responding to such proposals with an itemized list of our own sexual preferences. Moreover, the two members of the couple may simply not have the necessary emotional attachment to communicate effectively with each other. Clearly, however, two people capable of and committed to satisfying one another sexually to the extent that they would explicitly propose to do so and to respond to their partner’s proposal, would be more likely to have a fulfilling sexual relationship.

What makes it possible for us to be completely free in giving and receiving sexual pleasure? It can’t simply be the result of mechanical technique, having the right physical moves, like a dog or cat, because humans recognize and respond to ideas of right and wrong in one another, no two of us are alike, our social learning history and capacity for intimacy varies greatly, and any individual’s preferences change according to a variety of circumstances and conditions. However, consistently achieving such pleasure minimally requires unselfconscious, open, truthful communication on all levels—what we might call authentic intimacy.

Authentic Intimacy

What are the building blocks of authentic intimacy? We can rule out the popular beliefs—that it’s the result of

enjoying the same activities together, sharing a sense of humor, learning and growing together, common intellectual interests, etc. These are all sources of relationship happiness, even fulfillment, but not the kind of authentic intimacy that is likely to sustain lifelong erotic sexual fulfillment.

What enables us to feel entirely free to communicate our interior life to our partner, and to affirm to our partner our compassionate understanding of the interior life our partner has communicated to us?

Authentic intimacy requires emotional bonding, reciprocal empathy that builds trust and openness to vulnerability. It’s the basis of willingness to reveal one’s deepest emotional pain, anger, beliefs, dreams, mistakes and failures, fears, hopes, faith, curiosity, wonder, and playfulness—all invariably with an unalloyed expectation that one’s partner will not reject, ridicule, revile, lie, deceive, or attempt to manipulate us with what we have shared of ourselves. Instead, what we serve up emotionally to our partners, they return to us with understanding; and what they serve up emotionally to us, we similarly return to them³⁵—which is an outcome that relies on secure attachment, a relationship foundation ordinarily developed in infancy³⁶ but with lifelong implications.³⁷

Thus the essence of healthy marital relationship is emotional bonding because it is the “basis of loving and being loved.”³⁸ The test of authentic intimacy, which requires that bonding, is the ability to hear one another’s emotional experience—especially when it’s shocking and threatening—while not letting go of each other. This practice is reinforced by the traditional Jewish teaching of *chesed v’emet* (חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת), that our loving devotion does not soft-pedal the truth³⁹ but, as Magidah Khulda teaches, honors it.

In a marriage relationship based on authentic intimacy, spouses ask each other a basic question which they answer affirmatively: Are you there for me emotionally?⁴⁰ Moral-spiritual guidance on how to answer that question as Jews is given to us in the Torah.⁴¹ The Talmud (Kiddushin 41a) makes it unequivocally clear that the commandment to “love your fellow as you love yourself” (לְרַעֲךָ כְּמוֹךָ—Leviticus 19:18) applies to one’s spouse. So we are to treat our spouse as our closest “neighbor” (רֵעַ), which is from the Hebrew root ר-ע-ה, to tend to the needs of the other, caring for everything of the other, from his or her physical well-being to deepest emotional needs, as if they were one’s own.

Authentic intimacy is not the result of a decision made at a moment in time about one’s willingness to be open and vulnerable. It results instead from sustained emotional risk-taking in relationship, our commitment to transparency, responsiveness, and partnership, continuously applying ourselves to meet the practical challenges of maintaining intimacy over decades.⁴²

The spectrum of intimacy is enabled by relationships of socio-emotional trust, based on secure attachment as adults. They allow us to truly understand and relate to the personality and character of our partner with whom we make love, not just have sex. And the

last decade's research has confirmed that, "The best sex happens with securely attached couples."⁴³

Happily, multiple neurological research studies also confirm that the mind can overcome early insecure attachment, that the architecture of the brain can be changed by purposefully altering the neuron firing pattern.⁴⁴ In effect, new experience causes brain neurons to fire and, when they do, they can rewire important parts of the brain, including emotions and how we relate to other people. Fortunately, early attachment failures can be replaced by healthy attachment in adulthood.⁴⁵

Attachment & Moral Development

We know from the last decade's neurological research, infant experience of attachment plays a critical role in neurobiologically based moral development and life-long moral behavior patterns.⁴⁶ Human beings have a built-in potential for moral free will. However, absence of secure attachment in infancy or failure later to treat insecure attachment, doubtlessly handicap an individual's capacity for consistent moral behavior in adulthood.

Although largely out of fashion, it is a couple's shared moral and ethical code and vision that provide the impetus to tackle the therapeutic interpersonal work needed to achieve and sustain emotional bonding if it isn't present at the outset of their relationship.

Moreover, the couple's moral and ethical code is the basis for their dedication to truthfulness, unreserved kindness, unstinting justice, and exclusive commitment to one another. "Wherever there is unity of [moral] thought, purpose, and commitment, there is also personalistic [interpersonal] unity" [as a couple].⁴⁷ So, while adult marital love requires a safe emotional connection between the partners, which is a neurobiological "survival imperative from the cradle to the grave,"⁴⁸ similarly our moral capacity is neurologically based, and, when we view marriage in this way, the moral and ethical character and personality of one's prospective mate become priorities in the decision to join one's life with that of another person. This understanding accords with the traditional Jewish view of sexual pleasure.⁴⁹

The moral and ethical basis of the relationship provide essential support for continuing trust and vulnerability when emotional bonding becomes strained or broken. This foundation is a value-framework for the relationship, relying inherently in Judaism on *pikuach nefesh* (פיקוח נפש), the absolute moral duty to save life, one's own and that of one's partner, because we know that significant health problems, both physical and psycho-emotional, are linked to childhood and adult failure of attachment.⁵⁰

Shared moral values and principles of long-lived marital intimacy mean not simply that we love and live with another person, not even that we are "eternally committed" to that person, but that we have cast our fate with their fate. In effect, it is when we accept that our two fates become one: the common fate is such that, whatever the character and actions of our spouse, we unreservedly share all the consequences: "To love means to share an identity, one common destiny."⁵¹

The wonder is that, unlike infatuation-driven sex, the emotionally and morally grounded completely free giving and receiving is not short-lived. It doesn't dissipate in weeks or months or a year or two. While a couple maintain their health—especially psychological, emotional, and spiritual—it can last a lifetime. Every other kind of "sex" is a pale imitation, in longevity and erotic fulfillment. Rabbi Bulka assures us that, "It stands to reason that the warmth and intimacy of the conjugal union, and with it the pleasure sensation, likewise evolves over the years. In a marriage where the love grows, the experience of conjugality grows and becomes more fulfilling."⁵² And as Dr. Stephen A. Mitchell (d. 2000) has noted, "... ultimately, the emotional meshing and vulnerability of committed relationship can become the most rewarding source of eros."⁵³

Marriage in the absence of a shared moral and ethical code is both visionless and "lawless," one in which anything can happen and often will; which helps explain why so many marriages become devoid of authentic intimacy, ultimately unfulfilling, destroyed by infidelity, and end in divorce.

Boring sex, the absence of erotic experience, reflects a failure of intimacy, not lust, and its root cause is a lack of emotional bonding and shared moral-spiritual vision by the partners. Withal, it's possible to suffer in ignorance, deprived of pleasure, joy, and fulfillment without knowing it, because one has never learned the essential requirements to achieve these outcomes.

Intimacy & Sexual Relations

These considerations call to mind an issue that illustrates the importance of intimacy to achieving fulfilling sexual relations. In many marriages and relationships, pornography has become an existential threat. Men compulsively viewing pornography in the absence of their partners, in effect leading a double sex-life, threatens marriages.⁵⁴

Is addictive or habitual viewing of pornography by men in relationships a problem we should think about as pastoral counselors and, if so, why? The short answer is that pornography "despiritualizes" sex. Viewing pornography, which affects brain neurology,⁵⁵ reinforces in the viewer the idea that the pleasure of sex is primarily physical, simultaneously reinforcing objectification of one's relationship-partner.⁵⁶ When discovered, it creates betrayal trauma.⁵⁷

The commonplace lesson learned by personal sexual experience, however, is that the pleasure of sex is not primarily physical, that the "hot" guy or girl who was initially attractive, very quickly turns out not to be a source of continuing erotic fulfillment. There is very little connection between initial attraction and consistently fulfilling sex over time. Typically, in a relatively short period of time, we discover that the "hot" person has unattractive character and personality traits, or at least traits that don't mesh well with our own, and they have the effect of poisoning the sexual atmosphere between us. Often this occurs in days or weeks, but rarely takes longer than a few months.⁵⁸

As already suggested, the explanation is simple:

The wellsprings of consistent erotic sexual pleasure are the psychological, emotional, and moral spiritual conditions that foster intimacy—not physicality. It’s a matter of having a common “spirit” with another person in terms of our thinking and feeling, and pornography inculcates an entirely contrary understanding. What happens to that spirit when one of the couple regularly watches porn? As rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch [1808-1888] teaches, “... modest [i.e., bodily decency] [is] that fundamental trait of godliness in humanity without which justice and humaneness will be sought for in vain in human society.”⁵⁹ In other words, all-revealing porn effectively distracts us from our obligation to treat others justly and with humanity.

Thinking that pornography is not healthy or constructive is not a matter of prudishness.⁶⁰ It’s about what makes for long-lasting sexual fulfillment in a relationship, because it reflects awareness of pornography’s highly destructive effects on moral purpose in both personal relationships and the society at large.⁶¹

Foundations of Successful Marital Intimacy

Most of our ideas of romance are relatively superficial. There’s nothing quite as pitiful as a husband or wife whose marriage is falling apart who seeks counseling to “renew the romance” the couple first experienced. This individual wants to recreate the state of infatuation that existed at the outset of the relationship, to enjoy the feelings that existed before the partners knew one another’s character and personality.

Where do we get most of our ideas about romance? Obviously, every variety of commercialized media—newspapers, the Internet, magazines, books, television, films, billboards, and more—bombard us. They work to convince us that we’ll achieve romance with flowers and candy, fashionable and sexy apparel, candlelight dinners, diamond rings and gold jewelry, high-powered cars, perfectly clear skin or white teeth, a movie star’s body, walks on the beach in the moonlight, and so on. These commercial “messages,” obviously designed to sell products, nonetheless work their way into the popular culture, camouflaging infatuation as “true love,” and becoming customary relationship expectations.

When we consider whether and why marriages are successful or not, we find that when there is capacity for emotional bonding, mature love, in contrast to infatuation, is not a prerequisite for a fulfilling marriage. As Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb teaches, mature love is a “consequence of marriage based upon a common [moral] vision and goal of life,” and based on the perception that the partners are well suited to achieving that goal together.⁶²

Of course, the absence of romantic love at the beginning of a marriage does not preclude initial attraction, often called “chemistry,” which is not the same as infatuation. Marriages that don’t end in divorce typically begin with individuals who are well-matched in personality and character, who find one another’s qualities appealing, who then become emotionally attached partners sharing a vision and goal for their life together—supported by shared morals and ethics—which provides

the basis for coming to love one another over time as they work together to realize their vision of that life.

If love is essential for successful marriage, what should we regard as mature love that might last a lifetime?

Suppose we believe that, given our thoughts and feelings, we love someone. To test whether what we think and feel is mature love or something else, like infatuation, we should ask ourselves: What am I willing to give up for the other person’s benefit?

The root of the Hebrew word אֶהְיֶה, “love” in English, is אה-ה-א, meaning to be “devoted completely to another.”⁶³ The question of loving, then, is not *what* do we love about the other person, but *how* do we love that person—that is, what is it about our giving to that person (in contrast to what we get) that fulfills us and makes our own life worthwhile?⁶⁴

Rabbi Maurice Lamm (1927-2016) teaches that, “A man *takes* a wife [or a woman takes a husband] and begins a life of *giving*. Only in the intimacy of marriage can one reach the higher levels of the ethical life, levels at which one can rejoice in supporting, helping, and strengthening others without expectation of reward. The *taking in marriage cannot survive without the commitment to give*. This ‘taking-giving’ moral lesson is... described by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, a twentieth-century ethicist. “Is the giving a consequence of love, or is perhaps the reverse true: the love a result of giving? We usually think it is love which causes giving. But the truth is that giving often brings about love, for the same reason that a person loves what he himself created or nurtured: he recognizes it as part of himself.... On this basis, we can understand yet another remarkable fact. Why do we find so often that this husband-wife affection does not seem to last...? People generally are ‘takers’ not ‘givers.’ Each begins to demand from the other the fulfillment of his or her obligations. When demand begins, love departs.”⁶⁵

The question we might ask ourselves about what we call “love” is this: What does my love bring out in me? What does it reveal to me about my character and qualities? Does it reveal my giving, selfless side, or does it reveal my taking, selfish side? And which part of myself do I most want to develop and experience? If it’s not obvious, this conception of love entails giving oneself up to the other—not by subordination of one’s will or principles, but by devoting one’s gifts to the other by empathetically responding to the needs of the other.⁶⁶ But why should empathy be the measure of mature love? Because the roots of love demand reciprocity, empathy is indispensable—mutual “serving and returning” between two people. As we’ve said, this empathetic reciprocity makes possible the trust and risk-taking essential to achieving authentic intimacy.

What kind of practical giving might one do for the sake of a loved one? One might give up one’s popularity for a loved one’s health or well-being. One might give up one’s impatience to allow a loved one to express what’s important to him or her. One might give up personal preferences for a sport or hobby to enable sharing of activities with a loved one. One might give

up one's "face"—that is, endure embarrassment—for the sake of enabling a loved one to hear the truth. One might give up one's bad mood to show kindness to a loved one. One might give that which uplifts or sustains the life of the other, including even one's own life. All these examples reflect love transformed into words and deeds. They amount to devotion to bring the loved one near, to foster intimacy. If you doubt they would have that effect, imagine how you would think and feel about someone who was doing such things on your behalf.

Taken together, these acts of giving, rooted in our tradition of *חַסְדִּי בְּחַסְדִּי*—not loving-kindness as a thing, but *loving kindness* as action—have the effect of "... inclining the whole formation of one's character to loving doing kindnesses, to relinquishment of one's rights, to unselfishness, to happy self-sacrificing acts of love...."⁶⁷

One of the principles derived from these understandings is that before we find the right person, we must become the right person—a giver instead of a taker, capable of serving and returning along the entire spectrum of intimacy. In effect, "Conjugal dynamics, like marriage dynamics, is ideally the dynamics of self-transcendence rather than self-gratification."⁶⁸

We find the description of "true love" by Rabbi Reuven P. Bulka (b. 1944) to be a valuable statement on the subject: "True love, it turns out, is a relationship which is not based on the needs that are fulfilled by a partner, nor on what the partner has which is the object of desire.... True love is a human expression of appreciation and admiration for what the other individual is.... It is not a love which is related in any way to sensual pursuits, but is rather a love which expresses a sharing of values.... the classic love in the Jewish home may not relate to the sensually exciting picture that society associates with love, but the classical love is more meaningful.... The uncompromising durability of that love is enough evidence for this.... The two members of the couple, while maintaining their separate individualities, fuse together into a spiritual whole, a valuationally viable unit.... Where love prevails, one finds caring and empathy, immersion in the health and welfare, physical and spiritual, of the other. One finds in true love a spirit of giving where the giver experiences the sensation of receiving from the act of giving."⁶⁹

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808-1888) teaches that love without sacrifice of physical desires is a vain (i.e., empty) pretense.⁷⁰ Research at the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project seems to confirm this understanding. Researchers studied the role of "generosity" in the marriages of 2,870 men and women. They defined generosity as "the virtue of giving good things to one's spouse freely and abundantly"—such as making coffee for the spouse in the morning; regularly

expressing affection; and showing a willingness to forgive. They also defined generosity as going above the usual expectation to do one's fair share of housework, childcare, and being faithful—small acts of service and making an extra effort to be kind and affectionate when there is no obligation to do so.

Those with the highest scores on the generosity scale were far more likely to report that they were "very happy" in their marriages, which almost certainly included their sex lives. The director of the research project stated: "Living that spirit of generosity in a marriage does foster a virtuous cycle that leads to both spouses on average being happier in the marriage."⁷¹

If giving is more rewarding than getting, why is that true? In a study reported in 2016,⁷² the researchers found that "... the more participants reported giving support to others, the more caregiving-related neural activity they showed...." The researchers concluded, "... only support-giving was associated with beneficial outcomes," including health benefits. In other words, interpersonal neurological processes explain the intensity of the rewarding outcomes.

Epilog

We conclude our consideration of authentic intimacy and mature love in contrast to commercialized romance and infatuation—giving versus getting—with the findings of a recent study that suggest one final motivational key to happiness in relationships.⁷³ The study surveyed 80 adults to determine whether they relied mainly on hedonic sources of well-being, by consuming things; or instead relied on eudaimonic sources of well-being, by "striving toward... noble purpose beyond simple self-gratification."

Individuals who revealed higher levels of hedonic sources of happiness had significantly higher levels of inflammatory-producing gene expression than individuals who reported higher levels of happiness from eudaimonic sources. And studies have linked inflammatory-producing gene expression to diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and greater susceptibility to infection. So what we do with our mind "... changes the epigenetic molecules that are sitting on top areas of the genome that help prevent inflammatory diseases...."⁷⁴

Thus, even if there were no other considerations, it is in our self-interest to emphasize giving over getting in our relationships, to improve our own prospects for avoiding the morbidity and mortality associated with chronic disease.

As the rabbis have taught for almost two millennia, lust—strong sexual drive sharply focused on one's own sensual gratification—drives us out of the world of the living.⁷⁵

¹ Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) describes the origins and implications in his commentary, compiled and adapted in *The Hirsch Haggadah* (Jerusalem & New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1988), pp. 14-15: “If one wishes the spirit of ethical integrity to permeate this society, then there is only one way: ‘build houses’ (Yirmeyahu 29:5), for such a spirit can flourish only in the dedicated atmosphere of a home. *There exists no substitute for the home*, and if one is looking elsewhere for the source of peace and prosperity, he is searching in vain. All of a nation’s politics and diplomacy, its theories of national economy and institutions for mass education, its trade and industry, its schools and community centers—none of these will save the people from extinction if they let the parental home become a parody. Are children born for the sake of the state’s false concern instead of the warm love of parents? Does the census show ever-growing numbers of children without parents and parents without children? Does the nation’s high society make a mockery of morality and modesty? If so, then all the palaces it is building are founded on quicksand.” In the same vein, Rabbi Hirsch comments on Exodus 12:46: “. . . [E]very home is to be naught but the soil in which the spirit of national unity and the common national mission is to receive and achieve its care and fulfillment.”

² For example, “the matter evolved” (נִתְגַּלְגַּל הַדָּבָר) is an apt description of what happened in the story of Joseph (Bereishit 37:1-Shemot 1:1-22). The result of Jacob giving the coat to Joseph, instigating the jealousy of his brothers, led to the family’s descent to Egypt and all that followed. (Shabbat 10b)

³ The verse reads: When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out in the host [army], neither shall he be charged with any business: he shall be free for his house one year, and shall cheer his wife whom he has taken.

⁴ The rabbis interpreted the Torah to suspend exemptions from military service, however, for wars of obligation—for example, against invaders or to conquer Eretz Yisrael. See Sotah 44b for disagreements on the subject, such as whether a war to reduce the number of idolaters that might come upon Israel is a preemptive war and thus discretionary or not.

⁵ Reuven P. Bulka, *Jewish Marriage, A Halakhic Ethic* (New York and Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House—Yeshiva University Press, 1986), p. 77.

⁶ See Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2008), Kindle edition (loc. 3373).

⁷ Rabbi Shmuley Boteach mentions a variation of this misleading perspective in *Kosher Sex, A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 54: “Lust leads to sex, and sex leads to love, and love leads to further commitment—and we should not impede what comes naturally and is healthy.” Chana Boteach, who operates the Kosher Sex boutique sex shop in Tel Aviv with her famous rabbi-father, advertises that the sex aids they sell will “revolutionize your relationship.” In effect, their commercial claim is that “Everyone needs this kind of stuff to maintain the lust.” See Deborah Danan, “The Kosher Intimacy Trader,” *Jewish Journal* (August 7, 2019).

⁸ See “Lecture #12: The Woman in Creation,” published online by The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash [<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/bereishit/12bereishit.htm>].

⁹ David S. Blanchflower and Andrew J. Oswald, in “Money, Sex and Happiness: An Empirical Study,” *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 106(3): 393-415 (2004), ask: “How many sexual partners in the last year will maximize a person’s happiness?” Based on data from a random sample of 16,000 American men and women, they conclude: “The happiness maximizing number of sexual partners in the previous year is 1.”

¹⁰ We have found almost no reliable research on the subject; however, our own professional experience is that openness to what many now refer to as polyamory, signals the end of long-term relationship for most couples.

¹¹ Although the belief that sex ends after 50 is commonplace in American culture, reliable studies entirely refute this misapprehension. See Samuel Stroope, et al., “Marital Characteristics and the Sexual Relationships of U.S. Older Adults: An Analysis of National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project Data,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(1): 233-47 (2015) [<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10508-014-0379-y#page-1>]; Stacy Tessler Lindau, et al., “A study of sexuality and health among older adults in the United States,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, 357:762–74 (2007) [<http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMoa067423>]; Edward O. Laumann, et al., “A cross-national study of subjective sexual well-being among older women and men: Findings from the Global Study of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 35:145–61 (2006) [http://www.hawaii.edu/hivandaids/A_Cross-National_Study_of_Subjective_Sexual_Well-Being_Among_Older_Women_and_Men_Findings_From_the_Global_Study_of_Sexual_Attitudes_and_Behaviors.pdf]; and Susan E. Trompeter, et al., “Sexual Activity and Satisfaction in Healthy Community-Dwelling Older Women,” *American Journal of Medicine* 125(1):37-43.ei (2012) [<http://www.amjmed.com/article/S0002-9343%2811%2900655-3/abstract?cc=y>].

¹² The concept of moral-spirituality, as used here, whether referenced as an intellectual ideal, behavioral standard, or emotional reinforcer, has two critical dimensions: (1) that realization of the full potential of humankind, individually and collectively, is rooted in shared morality and society’s moral infrastructure; and (2) that the potential for common morality is most fully achieved when the source of that morality is incorporeal, universal, and not itself advantaged in any way by its particular requirements.

¹³ See “Sukkah Vision,” published online by Torah.org [<http://www.torah.org/features/holydays/sukkahvision.html>].

¹⁴ It might be reasonable to imagine as much, but given contemporary hook-up culture and social media domination of social life, the issue of sexual consent alone is confounding for many young people. See Jessica Bennett and Daniel Jones, “45 Stories of Sex and Consent on Campus,” *New York Times* (May 10, 2018).

¹⁵ From 2011 to 2015, the number of students surveyed by the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System who had ever had sexual intercourse dropped from 47.4 to 41.2 percent. The number who had had sexual intercourse during the three months before the surveys dropped from 33.7 to 30.1 percent. Those who had sexual intercourse with more than four persons dropped from 15.3 to 11.5 percent. See: “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2011,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 61(4):1 (June 8, 2012) [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]; and “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2015,” 65(6):1 (June 10, 2016) [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention].

¹⁶ See Adena M. Galinsky, “Relationship Commitment, Perceived Equity, and Sexual Enjoyment Among Young Adults in the United States,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 42(1):93-104 (January 2013).

¹⁷ Joshua Hart, et al., “Attachment Style as a Predictor of Women’s Ambivalent Sexism Toward Men,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(4):507-518 (December 1, 2013).

¹⁸ See Rebecca L. Hainlen, et al., “Adult Attachment and Well-Being: Dimensions of Differentiation of Self,” *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 38(2):172-183 (June 2016); and Jesse Owen et al., “Toward a More Complete Understanding of Reactions to Hooking Up Among College Women,” *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 40(5): 396-409 (August 1, 2013).

¹⁹ See Kim Bartholomew, “Avoidance of Intimacy: An Attachment Perspective,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7(2):147-178 (May 1, 1990); and Aviv Weinstein, et al., “Sexual Compulsion—Relationship with sex, attachment, and sexual orientation,” *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 4(1):22-26 (2015). The authors note: “These findings seem to suggest that high rates of sexual compulsivity are associated with difficulty in forming secure attachment in adult life. This evidence is compatible with attachment theory that postulates that difficulties in forming secure attachment with others are associated with problems in intimacy. . .” (p. 24).

²⁰ Regarding the causes and consequences of young men’s fear of intimacy, Phillip G. Zimbardo and Nikita Duncan, in *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It* (TED, n.d.), note that male fears are often tied to lack of critical social skills needed to navigate intimate social situations (loc. 152). In “The Demise of Guys, In record numbers guys are flaming out,” *Psychology Today* (May 23, 2012) [<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hero/201205/the-demise-guys>], the authors describe a “. . . pattern [that] has escalated into adulthood where grown men remain like little boys, having difficulty relating to women as equals, friends, partners, intimates, or even as cherished wives.”

²¹ In a 2013 Gallup poll, 91 percent of respondents indicated their belief that it is morally wrong for married men and women to have extramarital affairs. See Frank Newport and Igor Himelfarb, “In U.S., Record-High Say Gay, Lesbian Relations Morally OK, Americans’ tolerance of a number of moral issues up since 2001,” Gallup, Politics, May 20, 2103 [<http://www.gallup.com/poll/162689/record-high-say-gay-lesbian-relations-morally.aspx>].

²² However, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article 134, still prescribes punishment for adultery. For example, see “Rapid Fall for Army General Accused of Sex Crimes,” *New York Times* (January 4, 2014).

²³ We learn from Juliana Horowitz, et al., *Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.* (Pew Research Center: November 2019), p. 31: “The decision to get married or to move in with a partner is a personal one, but for most married and cohabiting adults, love and companionship trump other considerations” for 90 and 73 percent respectively.

²⁴ Helen Fisher reports that, “91 percent of American women and 86 percent of American men would not marry somebody who had every single quality they were looking for in a partner, if they were not in love with that person.” See “Why we love, why we cheat,” TED2006 ◦ 23:27 ◦ Filmed Feb 2006 [http://www.ted.com/talks/helen_fisher_tells_us_why_we_love_cheat/transcript#t-865000].

²⁵ For the seminal study in this vein, see Helen E. Fisher, et al., “Romantic love: a mammalian brain system for mate choice,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 361:2173-2186 (2006), p. 2173.

²⁶ See Dr. Robert Lustig, “A Hacking of the American Mind” (March 15, 2018), presentation made at a meeting of the Silicon Valley Health Institute [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhh19cQukfg>], in which he stated: “In-love is infatuation, is dopamine. In fact, in-love is obsessive-compulsive disorder, which is high dopamine, low serotonin, which causes you to do all sorts of things you wouldn’t do otherwise, and totally ruins your happiness.”

²⁷ This effect is a variation on the psychological process of deprivation-satiation and the sociological process of declining marginal utility—that is, the less we have of something, the more we value it; and the more we have of something, the less we value it.

²⁸ See Sonja Lyubomirsky, “New Love: A Short Shelf Life,” *New York Times* (December 1, 2012).

²⁹ See Katherine Jacobs Bao and Sonja Lyubomirsky, “Making It Last: Combating Hedonic Adaptation in Romantic Relationships,” *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(3):196-206 (2013).

³⁰ See Ed Diener, et al., “Beyond the Hedonic Treadmill: Revising the Adaptation Theory of Well-Being,” *American Psychologist*, 61(4): 305-14 (May-June 2006).

³¹ Rabbi Avraham Peretz Friedman reminds us that, “The Torah’s objective is to maximize intimacy—emotional, spiritual, and psychological intimacy. The term for this most intimate relationship between a couple is ‘*Deven*’ (lit., union, attachment),” in *Marital Intimacy: A Traditional Jewish Approach* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996), p. 56.

³² For example, see commentary by Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch on Bereshit 43:14: “רחמים, the feeling that we are to have inherited means more than pity. The word is derived from רחם, by which is designated the most self-sacrificing energy of one being for the formation of another being to come into existence and be completed; רחם, the womb, is the hearth of the deepest devotion. And afterwards, too, when the new being is there, the רחם begets not only sympathy with its crying, but even more intimate joy with its smiling. A smile from the baby on the lap makes up for years of worry and sleepless nights. From this רחם is רחמים formed and not only suffers when the other suffers, but knows no rest until he sees him happy. . . .”

³³ For a complete introduction to the subject, see Omri Gillath, et al., *Adult Attachment: A Concise Introduction to Theory and Research* (New York: Academic Press—Elsevier, 2016).

³⁴ See Rachel E. Goldsmith, et al., “Betrayal Trauma: Associations with Psychological and Physical Symptoms in Young Adults,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(3):547-567 (October 2011); and Anne P. DePrince, et al., “Automatic Relationship-Harm Associations and Interpersonal Trauma Involving Close Others,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 33(2):163-171 (June 2009).

³⁵ The literature on the role of “serve and return” in healthy attachment is extensive. For two examples from unusual contexts, see: Philip A. Fisher, et al., Promoting Healthy Child Development via a Two-Generation Translational Neuroscience Framework: The Filming Interactions to Nurture Development Video Coaching Program,” *Child Development Perspectives*, 10(4):251-256 (December 2016); and Clare Huntington, “Neuroscience and the Child Welfare System,” *Journal of Law and Policy*, 21(1):36-57 (2012).

³⁶ See Linda Mayes, et al., “The Neural and Psychological Dynamics of Adults’ Transition to Parenthood,” NIH Public Access, *Zero Three*, 33(2):83-84 (November 2012) [<http://pubmedcentralcanada.ca/pmc/articles/PMC3632182/pdf/nihms444055.pdf>].

³⁷ Istvan Molnar-Szakacs, “From actions to empathy and morality—A neural perspective,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 77(1):76-85 (January 2011) presents “. . . evidence suggesting that the human MNS [mirror neuron system]—by linking intention and outcome, observer and actor—forms part of the neural system for empathic concern, the capacity to understand and feel another’s emotional state. By helping to establish a ‘likeness’ between interacting agents, the human MNS may support the active desire to understand others, to feel what they are feeling and to help alleviate another’s suffering. By providing a biological substrate for such fundamental affiliative behaviors, the MNS may provide a neural scaffold for the evolution of our sophisticated sociality and the morality that governs it.”

³⁸ Initially recognized and developed from a scholarly theoretical perspective by John Bowlby, the founder of attachment theory. See Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (loc. 267).

³⁹ See Hirsch commentary on Bereshit 47:29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., loc. 627.

⁴¹ We are “. . . to exert ourselves in the rescuing of our fellows and to devise means of helping them in their time of distress, as it is written ‘Neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.’” See Jonah ben Avraham of Gerona, *Shaarei Teshuvah* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1967), pp. 188-91. According to the Chofetz Chaim: “If a person sees someone drowning in a river or facing any other danger, it is a mitzvah to save him. To stand idle in such a case is forbidden (Vayikra 19:16). If one lacks the ability to save the person himself, he must pay others to do it. A person violates this prohibition if he is negligent in this duty (Choshen Mishpat 426). . . . This is true as well when we see people so mentally enfeebled and preoccupied with the trivialities of the times that they have forgotten G-d’s Torah and their great obligation to keep His mitzvos and have thereby come to violate commandments for which one incurs kareis.” See (Raphael Blumberg, tr.) *Let Them Serve Me*, The Chofetz Chaim on Chumash Vayikra (Jerusalem: Machon Bais Yechiel Jerusalem, 1995), p. 121. According to Exodus Rabbah 27:9: “The Sages explain ‘My son, if thou art surety for thy neighbor’ as referring to Israel who are responsible for one another to God. Israel are beloved for they are called friends, as it says, For my brethren and friends’ sakes (Ps. CXXII, 8).” Neighbor here may be understood as friend and, as the Talmud teaches, “Each Jew became responsible for the other when they exclaimed, ‘We will do and we will hear.’” (Sota 37b)

⁴² For a contemporary yet traditional illustration, see Josh Tapper’s film review, “Haredi filmmaker aims lens inward in acclaimed ‘Fill the Void,’” *Jweekly.com* (November 15, 2012) [<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/67009/haredi-filmmaker-aims-lens-inward-in-acclaimed-fill-the-void/>].

⁴³ From Sue Johnson, “The New Science of Romantic Love: What You Understand, You Can Shape,” YouTube (December 15, 2015) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDVPszHngO8>]. More definitively, see: Susan Johnson and Dino Zuccarini, “Integrating sex and attachment in Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36(4):431-445 (October 2010); Azadeh Soltani, “A Study on the Effectiveness of Emotional Focused Couple Therapy on Intimacy of Couples,” *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 82: 461-465 (2013); and Stephanie A. Wiebe and Susan M. Johnson, “A Review of the Research in Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples,” *Family Process*, 55(3):390-407 (2016).

⁴⁴ See Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind, How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2d ed. (New York & London: Guilford Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ The potential for attachment in adult relationships is considered in depth based on an extensive, scholarly survey of research in the field, in Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, *Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change* (New York — London: Guilford Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ In their survey of experimental data on the “neurological origin of the moral sense,” Donatella Marazziti, et al., “The neurobiology of moral sense: facts or hypotheses?” *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 12:6 (March 6, 2013), concluded: “The available findings would suggest that there might be a main integrative centre for the innate morality, in particular the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, with its multiple connections with the limbic lobe, thalamus and brainstem. The subjective moral sense would be the result of an integration of multiple automatic responses, mainly associated with social emotions and interpretation of others’ behaviours and intentions.” See also Allan N. Schore, “Foreword,” in Darcia Narvaez, ed., *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality: Evolution, Culture, and Wisdom* (W.W. Norton, 2014); Leo Pascual, et al., “How does morality work in the brain? A functional and structural perspective of moral behavior,” *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience*, 7 (September 2013); Dr. Mario F. Mendez, “The Neurobiology of Moral Behavior: Review and Neuropsychiatric Implications,” *CNS Spectrums*, 14(11):608-620 (November 2009); and Manuela Fumagalli and Alberto Priori, “Functional and clinical neuroanatomy of morality,” *Brain*, 135:2006-2021 (2006).

⁴⁷ From “Torah and Humility,” Virtual Beit Midrash divrei Torah [<http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/humility.htm>], based on a lecture by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l, originally delivered in 1971, and adapted by Rav Ezra Bick.

⁴⁸ See Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (loc. 267).

⁴⁹ Rabbi Friedman teaches that, “. . . Pleasure is a happy and not unwelcome by-product that accompanies and results from the proper observance and fulfillment of many of our God-given obligations,” in *Marital Intimacy: A Traditional Jewish Approach*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ “Attachment patterns from childhood through adulthood are associated with a range of health-related outcomes, including physiological stress responses, health behavior, and health and disease conditions.” See Paula R. Pietromonaco, et al., “Health and Attachment Processes,” in (Jeffrey A. Simpson and W. Steven Rholes, eds.) *Attachment Theory and Research: New Directions and Emerging Themes* (New York & London: Guilford Press, 2015), p. 309.

⁵¹ From: “Torah and Humility.”

⁵² Bulka, p. 125.

⁵³ As cited in Daniel Bergner, “Unexcited? There May Be a Pill for That,” *New York Times* (May 22, 2013).

⁵⁴ Although it may seem improbable, viewing porn can also threaten life. An Arkansas woman was charged with murder after she became enraged and fatally shot her husband upon discovering that he had re-subscribed to a cable TV pornography channel. She described pornography as a “personal affront.” See Associated Press, “Attorneys Cite Porn Dispute in Arkansas Murder Trial,” *New York Times* (April 23, 2019).

⁵⁵ Simone Kuhn and Jurgen Gallinat, “Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated With Pornography Consumption—The Brain on Porn,” *JAMA Psychiatry*, 71(7):827-834 (2014).

⁵⁶ See Tracy L. Tylka, “You Looking at Her ‘Hot’ Body May Not be ‘Cool’ for Me,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(1):67-84 (March 1, 2015).

⁵⁷ See Barbara A. Steffens and Robyn L. Rennie, “The Traumatic Nature of Disclosure for Wives of Sexual Addicts,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 13(2-3):247-267 (2006); and Destin N. Stewart and Dawn M. Szymanski, “Young Adult Women’s Reports of Their Male Romantic Partner’s Pornography Use as a Correlate of Their Self-Esteem, Relationship Quality, and Sexual Satisfaction,” *Sex Roles*, 67(5-6):257-271 (September 2012).

⁵⁸ This outcome accords well with the typical consequences of sexual objectification, “representing or treating another person like a sex object, one that serves another’s sexual pleasure,” which include: depression, eating disorders, body shame, depressed cognitive functioning, sexual dysfunction, and lower sex-esteem. See Caroline Heldman, “The Sexy Lie” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMS4VJKekW8>].

⁵⁹ Hirsch on Shemot 20:26—עֲלוֹתַי אֶשָּׂא לֹא-תִגָּלָה עֲרוֹתְךָ עָלַי (“And you shall not ascend My altar by steps, so that your nakedness will not be uncovered upon it.”)

⁶⁰ See Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); and Christine Wilcox, *How is Online Pornography Affecting Society?* (San Diego: ReferencePoint Press, 2016). See also Nicholas Kristof, “The Children of Pornhub,” *New York Times* (December 4, 2020) and “An Uplifting Update, on the Terrible World of Pornhub,” *New York Times* (December 9, 2020).

⁶¹ The current (2025) national Epstein-Maxwell scandal which involves a large number of high-placed men, including the President, has resulted in a massive effort to suppress the truth of their exploitation of underage girls and young women. It forces us to confront their public behavior as performative affectations in the light of their private moral corruption.

⁶² See “The ‘We’ Relationship,” published online by Torah.org [<http://www.torah.org/features/par-kids/werltnshp.html>].

⁶³ See Rabbi Matityahu Clark, *Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem & New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1999), p. 4

⁶⁴ “Intimacy for its own sake (solely for the producing and enjoyment of the incomparable physical pleasure it affords, without thought or intention of achieving greater marital bonding) is frowned upon by the Torah and does *not* enjoy the Torah’s encouragement. This type of hedonism and/or selfishness in sexual indulgence runs contrary to the Torah’s entire conception of sexual enjoyment . . .,” in *Marital Intimacy: A Traditional Jewish Approach*, p. 57.

⁶⁵ Excerpted from Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 159-60.

⁶⁶ Ironically, “The more we can reach out [emotionally] to our partners, the more separate and independent we can be.” See Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (loc. 301).

⁶⁷ See Hirsch commentary on Numbers 20:29.

⁶⁸ Bulka, p. 126.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 71-73.

⁷⁰ See Hirsch commentary on Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁷¹ Reported by Tara Parker-Pope, “The Generous Marriage,” *New York Times Magazine* (December 11, 2011).

⁷² Reported in Tristen K. Inagaki, et al., “The neurobiology of Giving Versus Receiving Support: The Role of Stress-Related and Social Reward-Related Neural Activity,” *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 78: 443-453 (May 2016), p. 450.

⁷³ See Barbara L. Fredrickson, et al., “A functional genomic perspective on human well-being,” *PNAS*, 110(33):13684-13689 (August 13, 2013).

⁷⁴ Quoted in Daniel Siegel and Ruth Buczynski, “Rethinking Trauma, Transcript of Part 1: How to Use Brain Science to Help Patients Accelerate Healing After Trauma,” National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine [<https://www.nicabm.com/treatingtrauma2017/confirmed/?l=4>].

⁷⁵ See Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), 4:21.

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